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# Nursing home in the red

Budget deficit, empty beds  
discussed at county meeting

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Staffing problems, empty beds and a budget deficit at the Sullivan County Nursing Home were the topics of discussion at the Sullivan County Commissioners meeting Wednesday afternoon.



**Unity** The news was in sharp contrast to what was reported toward the end of last year.

Sullivan County Health Care administrator Scott Wojkiewicz reported that the nursing home is \$58,974 in the red for the month of March. As recently as last June, the home was reporting a \$40,000 surplus.

"We have just not been able to fill the beds," Wojkiewicz said. "We're diligently trying to fill the beds."

See **DEFICIT** - Page A8

**DEFICIT** FROM PAGE A1

Of the 156 total beds in the facility, 146 are currently filled, according to Sullivan County Manager Ed Gil de Rubio. But the problem is with money from Medicare A, which is only at 55 percent of the projected budget.

"If we're able to fill our beds, they will probably come from Medicare," Wojkiewicz said.

In January 2005, Genesis HealthCare signed a contract with the county to serve as a consultant for the nursing home. Prior to the arrival of Genesis, the nursing home ran deficits of more than \$1 million.

For fiscal 2005, Genesis reduced the deficit to just over \$200,000 and by 2006 the deficit was essentially eliminated, according to county officials.

Those monetary gains were reported to have been possible from a large influx of Medicare and private-pay patients into the facility. These types of patients usually require some form of skilled care with reimbursement rates from the federal government nearly four times higher than the \$140 per day allotted for Medicaid patients.

When questioned if the county home would have a budget deficit at the end of the fiscal year on June 30, Gil de Rubio said he is currently working on the budget and plans to do a

cash flow analysis.

"We had an aggressive budget," Gil de Rubio said.

The current deficit was blamed on an aggressive budget and a lack of patients.

"I think for this year the budget was overaggressive," Wojkiewicz said. "I don't think it is next year."

As for the lack of patients, Wojkiewicz had some ideas why this was happening.

"Sometimes it's hard to put a finger on why," Wojkiewicz said. "It seems like we are always the second or third choice of facilities around Claremont and Newport."

In July 2005, a new position of external care coordinator was created as part of a concerted marketing effort to improve the nursing home's relationship with area hospitals and the community.

Wojkiewicz said he wants to shake the stigma as the "poor farm" and invited people to visit the county home and see the type of health care offered.

Director of nursing Heidi Smith reported there were two open LNA positions and the facility was down six nurses in total. Smith said that for the month of March, 170 shifts could not be filled.

"Therapy and nursing staff are

doing a great job getting patients back on their feet," Wojkiewicz said. "We're open to any idea that will help us with our staffing."

Gil de Rubio said some of the call-out issues with the staff are directly linked with union negotiations.

"I'm in the middle of negotiations with the union," Gil de Rubio said. "The key stickler is health care."

Wojkiewicz said he is using a nursing agency to fill the empty LNA and RN shifts at the home.

"It's not like our residents are not getting health care," Wojkiewicz said. "We would much prefer to use our own people."

The future of Genesis is also in question as its contract with the county expires in June.

"We need to be more self-sufficient," Sullivan County Commissioner Jeff Barrett said. "The amount of things we rely upon for Genesis will be cut back."

Barrett said he plans to speak about the future of Genesis at the next commissioner's meeting.

"We'll talk about where we are with Genesis and what direction we want to head," Barrett said.

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